

6. FIRST RECORD OF BROWN SHRIKE *LANIUS CRISTATUS SUPERCILIOSUS* LATHAM FROM INDIA¹

SUJAN CHATTERJEE² AND SUMIT K SEN³

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²DB 75, Salt Lake City, Kolkata 700 064, West Bengal, India. Email: sujan75@gmail.com

³508, Jodhpur Park, Kolkata 700 068, West Bengal, India. Email: sumitsen@vsnl.com

At Narendrapur, 17 km south of Kolkata, near the 23-acre Chintamani Kar Wildlife Sanctuary, at an altitude of 5-10 m, on May 14, 2002, at 1030 hrs, we saw and photographed two very rich-coloured Brown Shrikes *Lanius cristatus* – that appeared to have more contrast, at first glance, than the Brown Shrike we were used to seeing – sitting on a dry branch near a paddy field. Upon consulting field guides, we realised it was not like any bird cited in the available literature; it had a stronger and whiter forehead and superciliaries, upperparts reddish-brown, underparts, chin and throat white and below a deeper ochre.

We checked the illustrations and texts in the Indian field guides and they all suggested the presence of two subspecies of Brown Shrike within Indian territories, namely *Lanius cristatus cristatus* and *Lanius cristatus lucionensis* (Ali and Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Inskipp *et al.* 1996; Kazmierczak 2000; Robson 2000). We later identified the bird to be *Lanius cristatus superciliosus* which none of the Indian field guides mentioned, and it seemed that the bird was way out of its known range. References to worldwide experts on the group and their positive feedback helped us to confirm the identification.

This bird breeds in Japan in Hokkaido, Honshu, Kyushu and Tsushirna, and in the Russian Federation throughout Sakhalin. It migrates through Japan and eastern China to winter in Fukein, Kwangtung and southern Yunnan in China, in Vietnam, and in other parts of Indo-China, in the Malay Peninsula, and on the islands of Java, Sumatra, Ball, Flores and Sumba. The most westerly record is in Banguara in peninsular part of Siam (Dementev *et al.* 1954); our record could be the westernmost record in the birds' range.

The avifauna of West Bengal, Eastern India, has not been explored that well. Although many birders visit the hills of northern West Bengal, few visit the Gangetic West Bengal, the groves, the orchards or the water bodies that characterize the area.

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7. THE CHALLENGE OF THE *PHYLLOSCOPI*¹

T.J. ROBERTS²

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²Caer Gors, Rhoscefnhir, Nr. Pentraeth, Anglesey LL75 8YU, North Wales. Email: tjrpaknatur@aol.com

The universal appeal of birds, as we all appreciate, is in their great variation in size and form, coupled with their colourful and often intricate plumage patterns; add to this the pleasure we all get from hearing bird song. What then of a whole group (genus) of small birds that look remarkably alike, are rather drab in coloration, and usually do not sing until they reach their often remote breeding grounds?

Because they are in places, not only numerous but widespread in occurrence, sooner or later, even the neophyte 'birder' tries to get to grips with their identification. Any area of enquiry if pursued long enough creates its own attendant enthusiasm, often deepening into a veritable passion, and the study of these tiny, intensely active warblers can be greatly rewarding. In most parts of the plains of India there can be